

Feral Kitten In Ocean View Tests Positive for Rabies

OCEAN VIEW – Delaware's Division of Public Health (DPH) is advising Ocean View residents who reside in the Plantation Park community of a positive case of rabies in a feral kitten that came into contact with a human.

The individual was exposed to the kitten while taking care of a litter of kittens on the person's property. The individual sought medical care for the kitten after it suffered an injury. Based on symptoms at the time of care, the kitten was tested for rabies, and test results returned on Friday, Nov. 1, 2019, confirmed the suspected diagnosis. The remaining kittens in the litter were trapped by DPH and euthanized to prevent any additional rabies exposures to humans or animals. The exposed caretaker also has begun treatment for rabies exposure.

While additional human exposure in this case is low, anyone in this area who thinks they might have been bitten, scratched or come in contact with a feral kitten should immediately contact their health care provider or call the DPH Rabies Program at 302-744-4995. An epidemiologist is available 24/7. Anyone in the area who thinks their pet may have been bitten by a feral kitten should call their private veterinarian or the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) at 302-698-4500 or email deanimalhealth@delaware.gov.

Rabies is a preventable disease. DPH recommends that individuals take the following steps to prevent rabies exposure:

- All dogs, cats, and ferrets 6 months of age and older are required by Delaware law to be vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian.

- Pet owners can reduce the possibility of pets being exposed to rabies by keeping them indoors and not letting them roam free. It is especially important that pet owners who do allow their cats to roam outdoors vaccinate their pets.
- Do not touch or otherwise handle wild or unfamiliar animals, including cats and dogs, even if they appear friendly.
- Do not keep your pet's food or water outdoors; bowls can attract wild and stray animals. Do not feed feral animals, including cats, as the risk of rabies in wildlife is significant.
- Spaying or neutering your pet may reduce the tendency to roam or fight and, thus, reduce the chance they will be exposed to rabies.
- Keep your garbage securely covered.
- Consider vaccinating livestock and horses as well. It is recommended to consult with your private veterinarian if you have any questions regarding whether your animal(s) should be vaccinated against rabies.

Since Jan. 1, 2019, the Division of Public Health (DPH) has performed rabies tests on 137 animals, nine of which were confirmed to be rabid, including six raccoons, two cats (including this one), and a skunk. DPH only announces those rabies cases for which it is possible the animal had unknown contacts with additional humans or pets.

In 2018, DPH performed rabies tests on 146 animals, 19 of which were confirmed to be rabid, including six raccoons, five cats, one dog, five foxes, one horse, and one donkey. Additionally last year, DPH announced Delaware's first positive case of rabies in a human in nearly 80 years. A Felton woman died after contracting the disease.

Rabies is an infectious disease affecting the nervous system

of humans and other mammals. Infection can occur through the bite or scratch of an infected animal or if saliva from such an animal gets into the eyes, nose, mouth or an opening in the skin. Rabies in humans and animals cannot be cured once symptoms appear, and therefore, if an animal that has exposed a human is unavailable to be quarantined or tested, DPH recommends that people receive post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment, a series of four vaccinations, as a precautionary measure.

If You Encounter an Animal Behaving Aggressively:

- If you encounter a wild animal behaving aggressively, it is recommended you contact the DNREC's Wildlife Section at 302-739-9912 or 302-735-3600. Staff will determine whether it is more appropriate to refer callers to a private nuisance wildlife control operator. A listing of nuisance wildlife control operators can be found at <https://wildlifehelp.org/>.
- Do not throw items at the animal or make loud banging noises, which may startle the animal and cause it to attack. Instead, your initial response – if the animal is behaving in an aggressive manner or appears to be foaming at the mouth – should be to raise your hands above your head to make yourself appear larger to the animal while slowly backing away from it. If the animal starts coming toward you, raise your voice and yell sternly at it “Get away!” If all that fails, use any means to protect yourself including throwing an object at the animal or trying to keep it away by using a long stick, shovel or fishing pole.
- If you encounter a stray or feral domestic animal behaving aggressively, contact the Office of Animal Welfare at 302-255-4646.

If You Encounter a Sick or Injured Animal:

- To report a sick or hurt wild animal, Delaware residents are asked to contact the DNREC's Wildlife Section at 302-739-9912

or 302-735-3600. Staff will determine whether it is more appropriate to refer callers to a permitted volunteer wildlife rehabilitator.

- If you encounter a sick stray domestic animal (cat or dog) contact the Office of Animal Welfare at 302-255-4646.

For more information on the DPH rabies program, visit <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/dpc/rabies.html> or call 1-866-972-9705 or 302-744-4995. For more information on rabies, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.